



## THE SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

### INTRODUCTION:

Howard County Subdivision and Land Development Regulations are intended to promote the health, safety and general welfare of County residents. The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) is responsible for processing and approving all subdivision and land development plans within the County with assistance from the Subdivision Review Committee (SRC).

### WHAT ARE THE BASIC STAGES TO SUBDIVIDE OR DEVELOP LAND?

There are two processes which a developer may choose from for major subdivisions:

#### PROCESSING STAGES –

##### Standard Plan Submission:

Sketch Plan\* → Preliminary Plan → Final Plan → Site Development Plan

##### Alternate Plan Submission:

Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan\* → Final Plan → Site Development Plan

\*An Environmental Concept Plan (ECP) must be submitted with the Sketch Plan or with the Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan and prior to submission of a minor final subdivision plan and site development plan.

- An **Environmental Concept Plan (ECP)** is the first of three required plan approvals that includes the information necessary to allow an initial evaluation of a proposed project. The ECP includes a conceptual design for storm water management, erosion and sediment control and the delineation of environmental features. The pre-submission of an ECP to the Department of Planning and Zoning is required for proposed storm water management facilities to demonstrate how the environmental site design is achieved to the maximum extent practicable. Contact the DPZ, Development Engineering Division for information about the ECP Process.
- A **Sketch Plan** informs the County of the intent of the property owner or developer to subdivide, the proposed timing for development and the design concept. It displays information such as density, road network, lot layout, an environmental analysis of the property and may include green neighborhood site design considerations. The sketch plan process also familiarizes the developer with County and State plans and regulations

which may affect the subdivision, such as the General Plan, Adequate Public Facilities testing, the Capital Improvement Program and Forest Conservation requirements.

- A **Preliminary Plan** presents preliminary engineering to implement the approved sketch plan. The preliminary plan addresses the lot and road arrangement, traffic and noise conditions, forest conservation, environmental impact, sewage disposal, water supply, drainage, storm water management and proposed grading.
- A **Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan** is an alternate plan process which includes all the information normally required with both the sketch and preliminary plan submissions on one plan. Although this combined submission is optional for major subdivisions using public water and sewer, it is required for major subdivisions in the RR, RC and R-ED zoning districts.
- A **Final Subdivision Plan** is the culmination of the subdivision process. The final plan submission includes a final subdivision plat which will become the official record of the subdivision of land into lots, parcels and road right-of-ways. The submission also includes construction drawings for roads, water and sewer, storm water management and any other infrastructure items. For minor subdivisions which create four or fewer lots for residential or agricultural purposes, a final subdivision plan is the only stage required for subdivision processing.
- A **Site Development Plan (SDP)** is a detailed engineered drawing required for commercial, institutional, industrial and most residential development. Generally, an SDP includes existing and proposed structures, green “LEED” certified buildings and green neighborhood site design considerations if applicable, paved areas, topography, drainage and storm water management, sediment and erosion control measures, utilities, easements, 100 year floodplain, wetlands, streams, forest stand delineation, forest conservation easement areas and landscaping.

## HOW DO I APPLY?

DPZ has subdivision, SDP and ECP plan applications and checklists available at the Public Service Center to assist property owners or developers with the plan preparation and submittal requirements. Applications and checklists are also available on DPZ's web site at: <http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/formsfeesapplications.htm> and through the “Project Dox” electronic plan processing system for SDP and ECP plan submissions.

A Maryland registered engineer, architect and/or land surveyor must prepare the necessary plans and supplemental documents.

## WHAT FEES ARE REQUIRED?

Filing fees for subdivision and SDP's are based on a Schedule of Fees adopted each year by Resolution of the County Council (there are no processing fees associated with the ECP plan). The Schedule of Fees is available at the DPZ Public Service Center. The fee schedule is also available on DPZ's web site at: <http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/formsfeesapplications.htm>

## **WHAT IS THE REVIEW PROCESS FOR SUBDIVISION, ENVIRONMENTAL CONCEPT PLANS AND SITE DEVELOPMENT PLANS?**

The seven basic steps for processing subdivision or development plans are:

### **Step 1 - Pre-Submission Community Meeting:**

The property owner or developer must schedule and hold a meeting with community residents for all new projects prior to submitting subdivision plans or an SDP (if the initial plan submittal) to the County. Additionally, SDP's are required to hold a pre-submission meeting for new non-residential developments located within 200 feet of a residential zoning district, or for existing non-residential developments with a proposed expansion of more than 25%. This is an opportunity for community residents to learn about, ask questions and express any concerns regarding the proposed development. Contact the DPZ for additional information about the pre-submission community meeting process and procedures or visit DPZ's web site at: [Development & Zoning: Development & Zoning](#)

### **Step 1a - Design Advisory Panel (DAP) Meeting, if applicable:**

A pre-submission advisory meeting with the DAP is required for all new development or redevelopment projects located in the Route 1 Corridor that are zoned CE, CAC or TOD or that adjoin the Route 1 right-of-way and are subject to the Route 1 Design Manual; for parcels located within the Route 40 Corridor as defined in the Route 40 Design Manual; for age-restricted adult housing projects pursuant to a Conditional Use and for redevelopment projects located in the New Town Village Centers and/or Downtown Columbia revitalization area. Contact the DPZ, Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning for information about the DAP meeting process.

### **Step 1b - Historic District Commission (HDC) Meeting, if applicable:**

A pre-submission advisory meeting with the Historic District Commission is required for new development located within a Historic District or if the site is listed in the Historic Sites Inventory. Contact the DPZ, Resource Conservation Division for information about the HDC meeting process.

### **Step 1c - Environmental Concept Plan (ECP), if applicable:**

The pre-submission of an ECP to the Department of Planning and Zoning is required for proposed storm water management facilities to demonstrate how the environmental site design is achieved to the maximum extent practicable. The ECP must be submitted through the Project Dox Electronic Process. Contact the DPZ, Development Engineering Division for information about the ECP Process.

### **Step 2 - Submission of Plans to the County:**

Subdivision plans must be submitted by appointment to the DPZ, Division of Land Development customer service desk located on the second floor of the George Howard Building. SDPs must be submitted to DPZ using the "Project Dox" electronic plan processing system. "Project Dox" is a tool for plan submission, review, approval and tracking using a paperless online system. Contact DPZ for additional information about "Project Dox."

The accepted plan will be assigned a file number and distributed to the Subdivision Review Committee (SRC), an advisory group of County and State Departments, for review, comments and recommendations.

The SRC is composed of the following County and State Departments:

- Planning and Zoning
- Health Department
- Recreation and Parks
- Inspections, Licenses and Permits
- Public School System
- State Highway Administration
- Soil Conservation District
- Fire and Rescue Services
- Public Works

### **Step 3 - Review of the Subdivision or Development Plan:**

The SRC agencies review the subdivision, or SDP to verify compliance with County and State regulations. DPZ coordinates the SRC comments. ECP plans are reviewed by only the Department of Planning and Zoning, and the Soil Conservation District.

### **Step 4 - Decision is Made on Technical Completeness of Plans:**

Within 60 days from submission of the plan, the DPZ provides a written decision to the applicant indicating that the plan is either: (1) technically complete; (2) technically complete with modifications, or (3) in need of revisions. A plan is technically complete if it complies with all applicable County and State regulations for development design. DPZ will provide an electronic decision to the property owner or developer through "Project Dox" for all ECP and SDP plan submissions.

If revised plans are required, the resubmission of subdivision plans must be made by appointment to the DPZ or electronically through "Project Dox" for ECP and SDP plans within 45 days of receiving the written request and SRC comments.

### **Step 5 - Adequate Public Facilities Testing (APF):**

The APF regulations require that all residential subdivisions pass adequate public facilities tests for elementary and middle school capacity, for adequacy of vicinal road intersections and for availability of housing unit allocations. The testing for vicinal road intersection adequacy occurs prior to the issuance of tentative approval of a Sketch or a Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan by the DPZ. Once the road test has been satisfactorily passed and the Sketch or Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan has been granted signature approval by the Planning Director, the tests for housing unit allocations and school capacity are given. The school test is not taken until tentative housing unit allocations have been granted. If housing unit allocations are not available or school capacity does not exist, the plan will be placed on hold pending a change in that status.

SDP's for residential units not requiring a subdivision are tested for road intersection adequacy during the review of the plan and are tested for allocation availability and school adequacy once the plan is determined to be technically complete. Nonresidential subdivisions and SDP's take the road test, but not allocations or school tests.

**Step 6 - Planning Board Approval, if applicable:**

Some zoning districts require Planning Board approval of sketch or preliminary equivalent sketch plans or SDP's. For projects in these zoning districts, the DPZ will advise the property owner or developer of the Planning Board hearing or meeting date at the same time written notification is given that the plan is technically approvable.

**Step 7 - Submittal of Plan Originals for Signature Approval:**

When a plan is technically complete and required APF and Planning Board approvals are received, the DPZ will give written authorization to the property owner or developer to submit plan originals (mylars) for signature processing. The mylars must be submitted for signature approval, processing fees paid and any required Developer's Agreements executed within the following processing deadlines:

- 45 days for Sketch, Preliminary and Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plans, and ECP Plans
- 60 days for Final Plan Road Construction Drawings/Supplemental (Landscaping, Forest Conservation) Plans, and Water and Sewer Drawings
- 120 days for execution of the Developer's Agreement associated with the subdivision. This process involves submission and execution of a Developer's Agreement associated with the development plan to the DPW, Real Estate Services Division for installation of public water and sewerage, forest conservation, landscaping, SWM, roads, and a Declaration of Covenants and Maintenance and Right of Entry Agreement for private storm water management, if applicable.
- 180 days for Final Subdivision Plat
- 180 days for Site Development Plans and their associated Developer's Agreements

**WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES FOR SUBDIVISION PLAN SUBMISSIONS?**

The County Code establishes deadlines (also known as milestones) for submission of subdivision plans for the next stage in the subdivision process. These milestones are measured from the date the property owner or developer receives written authorization from the DPZ to proceed to the next plan stage (i.e., sketch to preliminary, preliminary to final). The deadlines are as follows:

- 4 months for residential projects with 50 or fewer housing units
- 6 months for residential projects with 51 to 100 housing units
- 9 months for residential projects with 101 or more housing units
- 9 months for nonresidential projects

This schedule can only be modified if the project is delayed by government action or approved as a phased project.

## **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FINAL SUBDIVISION PLAT AND SDP RECEIVE SIGNATURE APPROVAL?**

- The DPZ records final subdivision plats in the Land Records Office of Howard County. Once the final plat is recorded, the owner is entitled to transfer ownership of the recorded lots or parcels.
- Within one year of signature approval of the SDP mylars, the property owner or developer must apply to the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits for building permits to initiate construction on the site. For single family attached, apartment and nonresidential developments with multiple buildings, the property owner or developer must apply for building permits for all construction authorized by the approved SDP within two years of signature approval. For single family detached developments, all permits must be applied for within five years of signature approval.

### **AN IMPORTANT NOTE:**

Howard County land use regulations are intended to promote the health, safety and general welfare of County residents. This brochure is meant to provide a basic understanding of the subdivision and land development process in Howard County. It is not intended as a substitute for the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations.

For more information contact:

The Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning at:  
(410) 313-2350, TTY (410) 313-2323

View the DPZ web site at: [HCG Home Page: Department of Planning & Zoning Home](#)

or visit the Public Service Center of DPZ on the first floor of the George Howard Building, 3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, MD. 21043

Office Hours are:

Monday through Friday

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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